

construction

in vancouver

Pause and reset

While COVID-19 has slowed B.C.'s overall economy, construction will help propel recovery as project activity and labour demand peaks loom large in 2021, BuildForce Canada forecasts

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OUTLOOK: PAUSE AND RESET: B.C.'S CONSTRUCTION MARKETS ARE SET TO REBOUND THROUGH 2024

Recruitment, training of new generation of workers remains top priority for industry

BY BILL FERREIRA

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, British Columbia in general, and the Lower Mainland in particular, were poised for a dramatic rise in construction activity and labour demand in 2021. While quarantine measures have dampened both construction activity and labour demand across the country, B.C.'s ambitious reopening schedule and the full resumption of many major projects will see that peak altered but not delayed.

The message for the province's construction and maintenance industry: do not count on an industry reset to change the pressing need to recruit and train new workers who will be desperately needed to fuel a recovery.

BuildForce Canada's 2020-2029 Construction and Maintenance Looking Forward provincial labour market forecast indicated that major non-residential projects and record levels of housing starts were driving the province to a 2021 market peak.

While the economic pause resulting from COVID-19 public health orders may alter the number of workers required, strong levels of activity and labour demand peaks loom large in 2021, as investment over the near term continues to be driven by a long, diverse list of projects that spans LNG, pipelines, utilities, transit, roads and highways, bridge work, hospitals and schools.

For B.C., a full recovery may come earlier than elsewhere in Canada. With the construction industry deemed an essential service, B.C.'s construction market has fared better than other provinces. With a relatively low infection rate of 57 per 100,000 and the province's success in flattening the hospitalization curve, B.C. is already in the third phase of its reopening plan as of July.

The initial uncertainty regarding the arrival of COVID-19 saw employers first focusing on their employees' health and safety. Industry activity soon began to slow for several reasons. In some cases, the pandemic affected both public and private project funding and project schedules.

Unsteady global oil and gas prices related to consumption collapse caused some major private sector projects to be deferred and contributed to the alteration of the scope and scheduling of other energy-related projects. Ultimately, to ensure worker safety and support provincial efforts to contain the spread of the virus, LNG Canada, Peace River Site C and the TMX and Coastal GasLink projects all saw



Bill Ferreira, executive director of BuildForce Canada | SUBMITTED

a significant reduction in workforce levels.

The Lower Mainland fared slightly better as many residential and non-residential projects continued to proceed largely uninterrupted. Construction work at the Port of Vancouver and TransLink projects continued to move forward, although work on the Vancouver International Airport was suspended in late March.

As recovery progresses, public-sector infrastructure projects will continue to dominate Lower Mainland demand, including the Pattullo Bridge Replacement, the resumption of the Vancouver International Airport expansion, pipeline projects, St. Paul's Hospital, the Broadway Subway Project, the Surrey Langley SkyTrain, and the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority container expansion program.

Investment is expected to remain at high sustained levels across the province to 2024, and then decline somewhat as several large scale projects such as LNG Canada, Site C, the Pattullo Bridge and major highway work, such as the Highway 1 upgrade and expansion, are expected to conclude.

In the residential sector, B.C. housing starts have declined from almost 45,000 in 2019 to a projected 34,900 in 2020. While a number of risks exist, including access to capital that may impact future investment levels, BuildForce estimates B.C.'s residential market will rebound more quickly than that of other provinces, with housing starts recovering to approximately 40,000 in 2021 and 42,000 in 2022.

While early anecdotal reports predicted a collapse in residential renovation work due to reduced consumer spending and concerns about COVID-19, indications are that the renovation sector continues to rebound, with outdoor work such as roofing faring particularly well.

Reports from BuildForce



In the Lower Mainland alone, BuildForce anticipates that approximately 25,300 workers are expected to retire by 2029 | RANPLETT/GETTY

BILL FERREIRA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BUILDFORCE CANADA

With the construction industry deemed an essential service, B.C.'s construction market has fared better than other provinces

Canada's B.C. provincial labour market information committee in early April revealed an encouraging trend. As clarity around COVID-19 protocols emerged, workers in general welcomed a return to employment.

That is supported by Labour Force Survey numbers from Statistics Canada, which indicated that the B.C. construction industry was performing significantly better than the national construction unemployment rate of 20.5% in April. During the same month, the B.C. construction industry recorded an unemployment rate of just 11.7%. That number dropped to 11.2% in May and is expected to drop even further in June.

While much of the province's apprentice training has been suspended during the pandemic, except for online courses, the continued development of new skilled employees to meet demand and replace retiring workers should continue to be a priority for the industry.

The BuildForce forecast anticipates that 44,200 workers will retire over the decade, and based

on historical trends, an estimated 37,800 first-time local new entrants aged 30 and younger are expected to join the province's construction labour force. That gap of 6,400 workers alone is significant and would be compounded by an increase in labour market demand.

In the Lower Mainland alone, BuildForce anticipates that approximately 25,300 workers are expected to retire by 2029. Even with 22,900 first-time local new entrants aged 30 and younger anticipated to join the industry, which means the industry can ill afford to neglect labour force recruitment and training over the course of the decade.

At this point, BuildForce foresees little likelihood that the Lower Mainland can count on labour market fluctuations in the rest of the province significant enough to satisfy local labour demands during the forecast period.

While recruitment from other provinces and other sectors remains a possibility, the industry will need to continue its efforts to recruit workers from groups traditionally underrepresented in the

construction labour force. That includes women and Indigenous people, who represent a small percentage of the province's current onsite labour force.

As the province welcomes an anticipated 50,000 immigrants annually over the coming decade, newcomers to Canada have the potential to help the industry meet its labour force requirements. Programs such as the British Columbia Construction Association's Integrating Newcomers program are a step in the right direction, providing immigrants to Canada with the resources and information they need to quickly integrate into the province's construction industry.

BuildForce is working on a mid-year investment outlook covering the next 24-month period. It will be published this summer, to assist the industry in better understanding the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on provincial investment. This work will be supplemented by the broader BuildForce Canada 2021-2030 Construction and Maintenance Industry forecast which will follow in early March 2021. ■

Bill Ferreira is the executive director of BuildForce Canada, a national industry-led organization committed to working with the construction industry to provide information and resources to assist with its management of workforce requirements.

Stimulus, sound public policy essential to COVID-19 economic recovery

Identifying “shovel-ready” projects that can be tendered as soon as possible is a priority



Today, the industry remains ready, willing and able to work and needs all levels of government to issue tenders and award contracts to keep the project pipeline full and employees working

BY FIONA FAMULAK

Our country and province have come a long way since COVID-19 emerged. And there is a way to go to rebuild our national and provincial economies.

When the pandemic hit, the governments of Canada and British Columbia rightly focused on three priorities: protecting people's health; providing financial supports for families and businesses; and ensuring essential services remained available.

With B.C. now in Phase 3 of its Restart Plan, and while controlling the spread of the virus and supporting affected individuals and businesses remain high priority, it's time for all governments to focus on infrastructure stimulus spending and developing sound public policies needed to rebuild the economy.

Reaching pre-COVID economic activity will not be easy. After two months of severe employment losses, B.C.'s unemployment rate in May was 13.4%, reflecting the 353,000 jobs lost since the pandemic was declared. Unemployment hasn't been this high since December 1981 and is a far cry from the near-record lows of below 5% at the start of 2020.

B.C.'s construction industry was fortunate to be deemed an essential service, allowing construction sites to remain open provided provincial health guidelines are followed, and helping to position the province for economic recovery. But that does not mean the industry has not seen layoffs as well as project

delays and increased costs due to COVID-19.

Before the pandemic, construction accounted for nearly 9% of B.C.'s gross domestic product and employed 236,000 men and women. Today, the industry remains ready, willing and able to work and needs all levels of government to issue tenders and award contracts to keep the project pipeline full and employees working.

Infrastructure stimulus funding can be applied to three types of projects. First are the smaller projects – those ranging from \$5 million to \$50 million – that provide myriad bidding opportunities for small- and medium-sized contractors.

Second are the projects idled during COVID-19 for reasons of cashflow and other operational considerations. These projects need a temporary funding injection to allow construction to restart immediately.

Third are the larger infrastructure projects that address national, provincial and local infrastructure gaps that will create significant family-supporting employment and enable long-term productivity improvements in the national and provincial interest.

In all cases, the focus must be on identifying “shovel-ready” projects that can be tendered as soon as possible. The federal government's recent shift towards “shovel-worthy” projects creates new delays as new projects are reviewed through a different lens.

While infrastructure stimulus spending is essential to economic recovery, it must be coupled with

public policies that support businesses rather than create undue burden that jeopardizes their very existence. In that context, our association has joined its many industry and business partners to advocate on three specific policies that, if enacted, could result in increased bankruptcies across our province.

First is the proposed national sick leave program during COVID-19. The issue is not about whether to support Canadians so they can stay home while sick, but rather who pays. While we're encouraged by the federal and provincial collaboration on the matter, until such time as details are announced, the business community remains concerned about the potential that employers may be required to assume the burden of sick pay during the pandemic.

Similarly, there is concern about COVID presumption and who will pay the wages of employees who contract the disease at work. **WorkSafeBC** is weighing a proposal to presume COVID-19 is contracted at work regardless of where transmission occurred. Shifting the costs of a public health crisis onto employers through increased WorkSafeBC premiums has no basis in science and could be ruinous for businesses who are unable to absorb any further fixed or variable cost increases arising from COVID-19.

Third is the temporary layoff provision in the Employment Standards Act that deems an employee constructively dismissed 13 weeks after being laid off. The provision was used extensively in the early days of the pandemic

as companies took steps to temporarily reduce their cost base in response to the intensely uncertain business environment. Last month, after unprecedented outcry from the business community, the provincial government extended the temporary layoff period until August 30 and directed employers who need longer to apply for an extension under the Act.

The extension is a welcome reprieve. However, because there is already a significant backlog of extension applications, the government's direction to apply for an extension beyond August 30 is not a solution but rather a burden on businesses at a time when their working capital is already depleted and their business continuity in question.

The federal and provincial governments' responses to the pandemic have been rapid and coordinated and have undoubtedly helped us navigate the pandemic to this point. And we have a way to go. While our continued health and safety vigilance will remain the keystone to our success, it will take a combination of infrastructure stimulus spending and sound public policies to rebuild an economy that works for all British Columbians. ■

Fiona Famulak is president of the Vancouver Regional Construction Association, which represents the general and trade contractors, manufacturers, suppliers and professional service providers that operate as both union and open-shop employers in the industrial, commercial, institutional and high-rise residential construction industry.

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WORKPLACE: COVID-19 HEALTH AND SAFETY

New procedures and protocols have increased costs for all contractors

BY BRIGITTE PETERSEN

New COVID-19 health and safety protocols will likely continue as best practices beyond the pandemic for Metro Vancouver construction companies, according to local business and association leaders.

Significant changes made necessary by the pandemic include new technology and procedures on job sites, in offices and at manufacturing facilities and supplier showrooms.

Plumbing, heating and electrical product distributor **Bartle & Gibson** remained operational throughout the pandemic and quickly pivoted to adopt new best practices.

Norm Bajwa, Bartle & Gibson's senior vice-president of plumbing sales, said while there is "not a textbook to follow," the company has been complying with B.C.'s health and safety recommendations.

"We, from the start, have quarantined any staff members that has been out of country, have shown any symptoms of sickness or have been in contact with anyone who may be infected with COVID-19," said Bajwa.

Bartle & Gibson installed acrylic sheets and kept its sales counters open to the public while providing hand sanitizer to protect customers and staff. The company also added signage, floor markings and boundaries to support physical distancing, limited the number of customers in buildings at the same time, made showrooms available by appointment only and increased cleaning.

"I feel that the changes and precautions we have taken will be the new normal at least until a vaccine is available, but maybe beyond," Bajwa said.

With COVID-19 creating numerous challenges, quick implementation of new protocols has been crucial, according to **Kevin Mierau**, president of **Mierau Contractors Ltd.**, a long-term VRCA member.

The Abbotsford-based company employs a full-time safety officer to ensure new health and safety procedures are followed.

"This is not a new position, but it did help make the additional protocols much easier to implement and monitor," Mierau said.

Changes such as frequent hand washing, physical distancing and use of personal protective equipment (PPE) required adjustments at first, but were quickly adopted by workers, he said.

"There are several scopes of work that are challenging when it comes to distancing, but proper planning and related PPE requirements address the

problems and allow for work to continue."

Like many other companies, Mierau Contractors has been holding meetings via video, and most paperwork that used to be couriered is now sent electronically.

"I expect most of the changes will remain as normal site expectations in the future," Mierau said.

Kim Barbero, CEO of the **Mechanical Contractors Association of BC**, said health and safety continues to be a top priority for mechanical contractors, which includes plumbers, gasfitters, fire protection specialists and heating, ventilation and air conditioning technicians.

When emergency orders swept B.C. and the industry continued to operate under heightened protocols, general contractors, trade contractors, their subcontractors and suppliers adapted collectively, re-assessed protocols regularly and improved processes in the fast-changing environment. This meant increasing the number of hand-washing stations with fresh water and hand sanitizer, using masks and respirators for tasks requiring workers to be within six feet of one another and developing new processes for sharing elevators.

New procedures have scheduling and cost implications such as additional time needed for on-site training and to meet physical distancing requirements, Barbero said. Increased use of PPE, sanitizers, extra time needed to move people and materials and site office requirements have also added costs for contractors.

"I do expect that post-COVID, the enhanced clean-up stations and facilities will be maintained," Barbero said. "I also expect that there will be a low threshold for people working if sick."

Work has remained the same, but how work is performed and the additional time needed for projects has changed. Contractors have had to absorb extra costs and implement performance measures to balance on-time project delivery with safety, she said.

"Mechanical contractors have become even more schedule-conscious, anticipating supply chain issues and delays and pre-ordering and pre-loading project materials – all of which has a financial impact to the mechanical contractor."

The biggest challenge for mechanical contracting teams on job sites has been adopting new practices that have become the new normal.

"Now they have to pause, pivot,



Craig Mitchell, Vancouver Regional Construction Association board member: "employers who may have traditionally frowned on workers taking sick days will now realize the importance of those days as a means to minimizing virus transmission and keeping their employees safe and healthy" | SUBMITTED



Deborah Cahill, president of the Electrical Contractors Association of BC: "on job sites, contractors are taking steps to ensure that there aren't large meetings in enclosed spaces where distancing isn't possible" | SUBMITTED



Kevin Mierau, president of Mierau Contractors Ltd.: "there are several scopes of work that are challenging when it comes to distancing, but proper planning and related PPE requirements address the problems and allow for work to continue." | SUBMITTED

think about the new procedure and then proceed," she said. "Education and daily reinforcement of the new procedures and protocols ensure mechanical contractors remain compliant."

Deborah Cahill, president of the **Electrical Contractors Association of BC (ECABC)**, said ensuring strict adherence to health and safety protocols set by the provincial health officer, such as practising physical distancing and wearing appropriate PPE, has been the No. 1 priority for the association's members.

"On job sites, contractors are taking steps to ensure that there aren't large meetings in enclosed spaces where distancing isn't possible," said Cahill.

Many office staff have been working remotely since



Kim Barbero, CEO of the Mechanical Contractors Association of B.C.: "now they have to pause, pivot, think about the new procedure and then proceed" | SUBMITTED



Bartle & Gibson's senior vice-president of plumbing sales, Norm Bajwa: "I feel that the changes and precautions we have taken will be the new normal at least until a vaccine is available, but maybe beyond" | BARTLE & GIBSON



Distancing requirements and other precautions against the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to be observed on B.C. construction sites | MECHANICAL CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION OF BC

BEST PRACTICES BECOME 'NEW NORMAL'

as industry stays vigilant against pandemic's spread

KIM BARBERO CEO, MECHANICAL CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION OF B.C.

I do expect that post-COVID, the enhanced clean-up stations and facilities will be maintained.... There will be a low threshold for people working if sick

mid-March, and ECABC's staff recently returned to the office, with the help of **WorkSafeBC's** Safety Plan tool and the **BC Construction Safety Alliance's** office reopening guide.

Cahill said electrical contractors and others in the industry have been sharing best practices and processes since the pandemic began. Some members developed client questionnaires to prevent exposure to COVID-19 and to ensure appropriate health and safety measures are taken. Others implemented in-house production lines for face masks, while many have been using a "text 'safe' for entry" process for staff to confirm they are symptom-free before beginning their workday.

Extra precautions taken during the pandemic have helped keep the number of COVID-19 claims accepted by WorkSafeBC from

the construction industry to just one as of July 1, but they also affect project timelines, according to Cahill.

"Reduced efficiency is definitely something that a lot of contractors are talking about," she said. "Taking these precautions does take time and can slow down work. Contractors need confidence that they won't be penalized if timelines aren't met because of delays caused by adherence to health standards."

Craig Mitchell, Vancouver Regional Construction Association board member, agreed that many of the health and safety adjustments in the industry are likely here to stay.

"From providing sinks with hot water on site along with flush toilets in some cases, the worksite may be forever changed," Mitchell said.

For suppliers and manufacturers,



Personal protective equipment, sanitizers, extra time needed to move people and materials and site office requirements have added costs for contractors | MECHANICAL CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION OF BC

there will continue to be greater emphasis on worker safety for those workplaces with a large number of staff in close proximity,

he said.

"Employers who may have traditionally frowned on workers taking sick days will now realize

the importance of those days as a means to minimizing virus transmission and keeping their employees safe and healthy." ■

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LEADERSHIP: INDUSTRY COLLABORATION IS THE KEY TO CONSTRUCTION'S SUCCESS

B.C. companies respond to pandemic with unprecedented level of behind-the-scenes co-operative planning

BY DAVID WEIR

During the first days of the COVID-19 pandemic, British Columbia's construction industry found itself in a unique position relative to other Canadian provinces. Where many provinces shut down construction sites entirely, B.C.'s industry was deemed an essential service that, subject to provincial health officer guidelines, provided contractors with the opportunity to remain open and thousands of men and women in construction to work safely.

While the general public noticed that construction continued at a time when other sectors were shuttered, most did not see the behind-the-scenes collaboration that enabled the industry to quickly pivot to implement required enhanced health and safety protocols.

Within days of COVID-19 being declared a pandemic, and with the health and safety of workers everyone's No. 1 priority, construction companies large and small were sharing their COVID-19 response plans with each other in a bid to ensure everyone's safety.

"The pandemic created a sense of urgency for all of us in construction to either step up to the challenge and work together or risk having the industry shut down," said **Jonathan Boyce**, operations manager at **Ledcor Construction Ltd.** "We wanted

to share all that we were doing and get feedback from other companies so that we could continually improve and then share that back to the industry. As others were also sharing, this raised the bar throughout the whole industry.

"Now that we are four months into the pandemic, we can see examples throughout the world of sharing and collaboration. I am glad that we in the B.C. construction industry did not take that route."

The unprecedented level of collaboration paid off. As of July 1 WorkSafeBC has accepted 290 COVID-19 claims, and only one is from the construction industry.

Similar collaboration also occurred between the leaders of the major development, engineering and construction associations in British Columbia. Representing the residential and non-residential construction sectors and all facets of the industry from developers to engineers, contractors to manufacturers and suppliers, employer groups to unions, and safety organizations to insurance providers, a group of 13 associations gathered around a shared goal to work collaboratively to support B.C.'s development, engineering and construction industry as it navigates the pandemic.

Four months later and now some 20 associations strong, the group continues to meet regularly to share intelligence about the issues facing the industry, compile the



COVID-19 compelled B.C. construction companies to make a collective planning effort | WINNIEVINZENCE/GETTY

necessary resources and communicate consistent information to their respective members.

"I experienced a similar level of collaboration while president of the **Whistler Chamber of Commerce** in the lead-up to the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games," said **Fiona Famulak**, **Vancouver Regional Construction Association** president. "Starting a number of years out from the Games, the key resort partners worked collaboratively with the shared goal of successfully hosting the world."

"This time, the shared goal is to help the development, engineering and construction industry navigate the pandemic. It's a different goal but the collaborative process is very similar. We are laser-focused on providing our respective members with the resources they need to operate safely and deliver successfully."

Although industry collaboration might not have been obvious to

those on the outside, the outcome was. Construction has been commended numerous times by the provincial government for the way in which it pivoted to implement enhanced safety protocols to keep workers safe while delivering an essential service.

"Construction sites have been allowed to stay open throughout the pandemic only because the industry has been willing to find innovative ways to abide by public health protocols – and have shared what works with one another," said **Deborah Cahill**, president of the **Electrical Contractors Association of BC**.

The emergence of COVID-19 caught many off guard. Few could have predicted a global pandemic was around the corner as the provincial economy celebrated the start of a new decade with unprecedented demand for construction services and record low unemployment. Suddenly, businesses were operating without a

script, and a collective effort was needed to draft a playbook.

"The opportunity to collect member feedback on the challenges associated with running an essential business during this unprecedented time has been valuable," said **Neil Moody**, CEO of the **Canadian Home Builders' Association of BC**. "By sharing what we were hearing from our respective members, pain-points and trends were more easily identified and solutions implemented. This would not have been possible if the associations had worked in silos."

While construction has successfully weathered the immediate challenges posed by COVID-19, the work of industry and the various associations continues as they navigate through B.C.'s four-phase Restart Plan.

"In an environment of uncertainty, there is a lot to be said and gained through regular collaboration with peers who share common goals," said **Kim Barbero**, chief executive officer of the **Mechanical Contractors Association of BC**.

COVID-19 has had a devastating effect on society. Yet, it's also demonstrated unprecedented collaboration across governments, industry and their associations. We really are all in this together.

David Weir is manager, industry and government relations, for the Vancouver Regional Construction Association. ■

OUTREACH: REGION'S CONSTRUCTION FIRMS HELP BUILD COMMUNITY DURING PANDEMIC

Supporting struggling businesses and families is key

BY PETER MITHAM

Builders create the offices and homes where we live, work and play, and without them no one would have had a place to self-isolate when governments across the country began restricting movement in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in March.

But unlike many office jobs, construction can't be done at home, and the provincial government declared the building sector essential to the province's economic health. Protocols were implemented to keep projects moving, but workers were often toiling in neighbourhoods that resembled ghost towns. Most shops, including sit-down restaurants



Darin Hughes, president of Scott Construction Group | SCOTT CONSTRUCTION GROUP

and cafes, shut down. Job losses soared, and it wasn't until early June that reopening finally began



Harold Barisoff, vice-president of construction, B.C. region, ITC Construction Group | ITC CONSTRUCTION GROUP

to gather steam.

"Construction companies have been very fortunate that,

as essential service providers, we've continued to work," said **Darin Hughes**, president of **Scott Construction Group**. "As a result, we feel a responsibility to do something for the people that aren't so fortunate."

The company's mental health committee decided the best route was to buy meals from restaurants that remained open, supporting them in a tough patch and providing a decent meal for workers at a time of drastically reduced options.

"This is about the immediate need of a specific industry we could help," he said, noting that "thousands of meals" have been served at Scott job sites in B.C., Alberta, Ontario and even Texas. "We wanted to

support the smaller, local businesses that really depend on the neighbourhood."

Other companies have been nominated to follow suit in the initiative that carries the #lunchboxchallenge hashtag on social media. Upwards of 60 firms have now taken part, and about 75 local eateries have benefitted.

"Sometimes job sites are very disruptive to neighbourhoods," said **Harold Barisoff**, vice-president of construction, B.C. region, with **ITC Construction Group** in Vancouver. "We're supporting the local businesses and showing them that we do care, hopefully dispelling the perception of the big construction company coming

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE

TRAINING: DURING COVID-19, CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY EMBRACES ONLINE INSTRUCTION

VRCA, BCIT and BCCA meet challenge as pandemic spurs sector to adapt quickly with virtual training

BY PETER CAULFIELD

To fight the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in this province, the British Columbia government mandated physical distancing and restrictions on the number of people who can gather indoors.

The move has led many construction-related organizations in B.C. to change the way they deliver training and education.

When the government announced the provincial lockdown in mid-March, **Vancouver Regional Construction Association** (VRCA) education manager **Andrea Ringrose** immediately cancelled all in-class courses in March and began working with the instructors to move their training to live online presentations.

"Instructors had to first redesign their courses and then find the right technology platforms for them," Ringrose said.

Instructors also needed to address significant differences between virtual training and its in-person equivalent.

"It's more difficult to engage students online than in a classroom," she said. "Instructors need to put more effort into getting and holding their students' attention."

In addition to helping existing instructors adapt to online instruction delivery, Ringrose sought out new instructors who were already offering courses online.

The many benefits of online training notwithstanding, it labours under a perception challenge due to the hands-on nature of our members, Ringrose said.

"Construction professionals definitely prefer in-person classroom training," she said.

"However, their positive experience with virtual training during COVID-19 might demonstrate that virtual training suits them as well, or almost as well, as classroom training."

With over 13,000 students, the School of Construction and the



Wayne Hand, dean of BCIT's school of construction and the environment: "it required a lot of effort to think through all of the different constraints and still deliver programs of the same quality. We needed to get everybody to think differently for the new conditions" | BCIT

Environment makes up a significant part of the **British Columbia Institute of Technology** (BCIT). So, when the provincial lockdown was announced, BCIT declared a two-day time-out to allow for a transition from classroom instruction to online delivery.

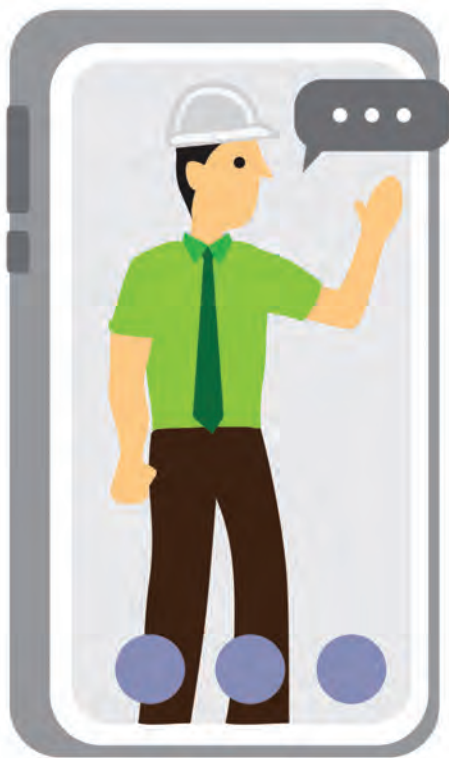
"The next step was to find out what courses could be delivered online," said **Wayne Hand**, dean of the school of construction and the environment.

The ease of the transition from in-class instruction to online varied from trade to trade.

"We have been able to transition most trades, except for welding, to online training," said Hand. "Portions of the welding curriculum can be taught online, but good hand-eye coordination, which is necessary to become a welder, takes lots of hands-on practice."

Compared to welding, however, much of the electrical training can be handled with videos and simulators, so students can get what they need from the comfort of their homes.

Starting this summer, the school of construction is offering a



The success of the rapid transition to online training in the construction industry during the COVID-19 pandemic has surpassed many expectations | HOFRED/GETTY

blended education model featuring online instruction combined with on-campus learning. Students back on the BCIT campus will be met with all the present-day safety restrictions: Hand-washing, the six-foot distancing rule and plenty of signs.

"Some projects will be scaled down, there will be no sharing of tools and toolbox meetings will be held every day," Hand said.

In the transition from in-class instruction to online, BCIT didn't face any serious challenges.

"But it required a lot of effort to think through all of the different constraints and still deliver programs of the same quality," Hand said. "We needed to get everybody to think differently for the new conditions."

Like the VRCA and BCIT, the **BC Construction Safety Alliance** (BCCSA) immediately cancelled all its in-person training – approximately 70 courses over two months.

The next step was to determine how to put the courses online, said **Mike McKenna**, BCCSA executive director.

In conjunction with trainers **Paula Gagne** and **Tanya Steele**, BCCSA initiated, funded and made the transition, said McKenna.

After successfully completing a pilot program, Gagne and Steele trained the other instructors in how to deliver online training.

"Our instructors are great and everything has gone well," said McKenna. "In the future we will

continue to use online training plus in-class instruction."

Steele said the feedback she and Gagne received from the students in the first course let them know they were on the right track.

"Some of the students said it was the best online course they had taken," Steele said.

The instructors did, however, have a few "whoopsies" and technical glitches.

"The students were very gracious as we worked through the issues," she said. "So far we have done several courses, and I can tell you that we are still learning things about the program, still having some hiccups and still having to brainstorm how to better use the technology to engage the students." ■

OUTREACH: REGION'S

FROM B6

in and disrupting lifestyles."

Supporting local businesses is not uncommon in downtown offices, where some tech companies give employees allowances to spend at local restaurants and shops. It's a perk that builds goodwill among workers and in the community.

But construction companies, which typically have short engagements in communities, usually find other ways to give back.

Building for Kids, now in its 25th year, is a long-term campaign raising funds in support of the **BC Children's Hospital Foundation**. Many teams from the construction sector have participated in Construction, an annual event in support of the **Greater Vancouver Food Bank**.

The importance of food banks to communities during the pandemic prompted **Ledcor Group** to contribute a total of \$400,000 to 20 food banks in Canada and the U.S., including those in Vancouver, Kamloops, Kelowna, Kitimat

and Langford.

The need to support families that were struggling was also a concern for **Mark DuMerton**, president of **M&L Painting Ltd.**

DuMerton was impressed with Scott's lunchbox challenge and heard other companies were sending employees out to deliver gift cards for groceries to families who needed assistance. He decided to follow suit and provided his firm's 90 staffers, as well as about a dozen subcontractors, with \$100 each in **Save-On-Foods** gift cards to give to families in need.

This is where his son **Alec**, a senior estimator with the company, stepped in. Through the **Tamara Foundation**, which the family established in 1994 as a not-for-profit focused on women and children, Alec heard **Backpack Buddies** was also in need.

Vancouver-based Backpack Buddies, founded by **Joanne Griffiths** and **Emily-Anne King** in 2012, ensures participants in school meal programs also have food on weekends. With school-based meal programs closed during the pandemic, Backpack

Buddies issued a call for support. M&L stepped up, contributing \$10,000 to Backpack Buddies' pandemic program.

"They (Backpack Buddies) know the kids," Alec DuMerton said. "They just stepped up immediately and filled the void."

The pandemic has created opportunities for local companies to focus not only on high-profile outreach projects, but also to support their employees who want to give back to the communities where they live and work. ■

A builder's lien primer

Contractors, workers need to be aware of time limits, legal requirements involved in pursuing liens to protect their interests



Land and improvements that cannot be liened include federal land and federal undertakings as well as highways

BY NORM STREU AND CHRISTOPHER HIRST

Builders liens can be confusing. While on the surface the concept appears straightforward, the details are frequently misunderstood even by experienced industry participants.

Frequently large general contractors, developers and trades, operate under fundamental misconceptions of what liens are and how they work. The following is a reminder of some of the key concepts.

What is a lien?

A lien is a simple and cost-effective tool for securing the recovery of unpaid contract amounts owed to construction industry participants.

A lien is intended to give those who have assisted in the improvement of land an interest in that land or the improvement until such time as they are paid. Section 2 of the Builders Lien Act provides a lien for contractors, subcontractors, and workers for the price of the work and material to the extent that the price remains

unpaid, on the owner's interest in the land, the improvement, and the material itself placed on the land.

A lien holder obtains a right to have a specific interest in the land sold and to be paid from the proceeds of such sale. In the absence of that secured claim against the land and improvement, a lien claimant would be left with nothing more than its contractual claims.

What can be liened?

"Land" and "improvements" are central concepts in the Act and generally speaking any land or any interest in land (e.g. a leasehold interest) that is registered at the **Land Title and Survey Authority of British Columbia** can be liened. In addition, holdback funds can be liened.

Land and improvements that cannot be liened include federal land and federal undertakings as well as highways.

When must a lien be filed?

The key time period to keep in mind with respect to filing a land lien is 45 days. A lien must be filed prior to 45 days from the: (1)

issuance of a certificate of completion for the contract claimed under; (2) completion, termination, or abandonment of the head contract, if there is a head contract; (3) completion or abandonment of the improvement, if there is no head contract; or (4) the first sale or occupancy of a strata lot.

A failure to file a land lien within the requisite 45-day period of time will result in the absolute cancellation of that lien.

How to file a lien

To make a claim of lien against the land, a lien claimant must complete a simple document called a "Claim of Lien" which then must be filed at the Land Title Office.

It is important to note that when completing this document you must be absolutely precise with respect to the name of the owner, the contracting parties, and the description of the title to the land that you intend to lien, or the lien may found to be invalid.

There are no formal requirements with respect to making a lien against the holdback. The most common method of making such a claim is to notify the owner in writing of the claim of

lien against the holdback and/or commencing an action with respect to the holdback.

So now you have a lien: how do you get paid?

A lien must be proved in **BC Supreme Court**. Accordingly, to enforce the lien, a lawsuit must be commenced.

As with the lien itself there are time limits here that a lien claimant must be aware of. A lien action must be commenced within a year of filing the lien or within 21 days of a demand being made by the owner of the lands that a lien claimant commence its action.

To protect your claim, a lien claimant must also file a document known as Certificate of Pending Litigation (CPL) with the Land Title Office.

A failure to commence your action within time or to file a CPL will result in the absolute cancellation of the land lien. ■

Norm Streu is president and chief operating officer of the LMS Reinforcing Steel Group. Christopher Hirst is managing partner and leader of the construction and engineering group at Alexander Holburn Beaudin + Lang LLP.

INFRASTRUCTURE: SOCIAL PROCUREMENT INVESTS IN PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

Initiative supports local government and First Nations through education, training and coaching

BY BRIGITTE PETERSEN

Including a social procurement element in building projects is increasingly becoming a way for the construction industry to partner with local governments in creating healthier communities.

Social procurement is a powerful tool communities can use with public infrastructure investments to create jobs, training and apprenticeship opportunities for marginalized people and to aid social enterprises, according to **Rory Kulmala**, CEO of the **Vancouver Island Construction Association (VICA)**.

This is not to be confused with the provincial government's Community Benefits Agreement which limits creation of jobs, training and apprenticeship opportunities to those willing to join one of 19 building trade unions.

The association, which has 480 members, began exploring social procurement in 2016 as governments across the country started looking at the concept as a way to benefit communities by addressing social challenges such



Rory Kulmala, CEO of the Vancouver Island Construction Association | SUBMITTED

as poverty reduction.

For example, explained Kulmala, if a local government is spending \$20 million on a construction project, it could designate some funds for a social enterprise or include a mandate to employ barriered individuals, women, visible minorities or immigrants to tie public funds to a social good in the community.

"It defines a social objective that the community wants to couple to that investment," he said.

RORY KULMALA, CEO, VANCOUVER ISLAND CONSTRUCTION ASSOCIATION

This isn't a save-money initiative from a project point of view, but it is an investment where you're putting people to work and you'll see a benefit for those people

Active on Vancouver Island, the Sunshine Coast region and other coastal communities, the **Coastal Communities Social Procurement Initiative (CCSPI)** supports local government and First Nations social procurement through education, training and coaching. The initiative, launched as a two-year pilot project in 2019 with seed funding from the **Island Coastal Economic Trust**, is a partnership between VICA, **Scale Collaborative**, **Presentations Plus** and **Buy Social Canada**.

Social procurement provides a way for public agencies to leverage an investment in people and communities through construction projects that were already planned to move forward, but it's not designed as a way to reduce project costs, explained Kulmala.

"This isn't a save-money initiative from a project point of view, but it is an investment where you're putting people to work and you'll see a benefit for those people," he said.

Growing as a practice globally, social procurement seeks to better invest tax dollars to achieve positive social outcomes that help improve the lives of marginalized people. For example, a project could benefit a social enterprise that provides landscaping services and employs recovering alcoholics or women who are fleeing abusive relationships, explained Kulmala.

"Social procurement can provide a purpose," he said. "And sometimes when people have a purpose, they're more likely to see a quicker recovery or

some kind of stability that they wouldn't otherwise have."

Initially, six Vancouver Island communities subscribed to the CCSPI's hub: Campbell River, Cumberland, Parksville, Qualicum Beach, Tofino and Victoria. Today, about 22 communities fund the initiative by subscribing, giving members access to resources on CCSPI's website. The site offers tools such as webinars, networking opportunities, tool kits and training for local governments about how to include a social procurement component for a project.

CCSPI also provides training and support for social enterprises, local suppliers and contractors to help them prepare for social procurement opportunities. Kulmala said including social procurement in a project is one way to help make a community healthier, but it should never override the entire project or take away from best practices in construction.

"Social procurement doesn't drive the project," said Kulmala. "In the whole scheme of it, it's a small contribution, but it can be a meaningful contribution." ■